



This project kept us busy all summer long.
The CD was shrinkwrapped in 3-color printed plastic.
All the scribbles, scratches, and type were done on the computer. ♦





A selection of things we did. Everyone was happy, especially us. We loved working on this project. (144)



All the short days of winter give Hjalti and Jan serious spring fever. They lean back in their chairs, feet on their desks, and dream of summer. Maybe this year they can join Paul in a share in Montauk. Or maybe—why not?—they can take a more exotic vacation. Or maybe nothing will happen. Nothing seems to be happening. They seem to be, well, a little stuck. They need something big to get them back up again.

The First Big Job.

Hjalti and Jan know music CDs are good work for a design office; the designers can assume the cool of the artist as their own. But thus far their musician clients—Pat Metheny and the Blueshift artists—have not quite been the epitome of the celebrity cool. Their next, the Vines, is more what they have in mind, though no one knows at the beginning of the project just how cool—and big—they will become. Except for a couple of reviewers in the British press, no one outside of Australia has heard of the band in May 2002.

The Vines are brought to the office by Mary Fagot, who has left Virgin for Capitol. She asks Hjalti and Jan to design the group's *Highly Evolved* package. Mary enjoyed working with them on the Moth design. Though that project did not run its full course, she knows the designers have potential. They only have to convince Capitol's new CEO, Andrew Slater, that they have what Mary sees. They send him their portfolio, and he likes it well enough to send over the band's music and a couple of photos of the young and marketable band members. Hjalti and Jan like the CD, and tell Capitol that they love it. Hjalti recalls that he thought the band sounded like the Strokes. Jan recalls that he disagreed with Hjalti on this. Hjalti recalls that Jan did agree with him. And so it goes.

Capitol asks for a series of elements for the new release: packages for the album and singles, as well as advance CDs, posters, stickers, and such. Karlssonwilker comes up with two proposals, more for the sake of having two proposals than for any indecisiveness about their direction. One shows a dark purple, pixelated image with a square logo. The other, the one that will be sold on nearly half a million CDs (as of this writing), shows ecstatic red scribbles replacing the simple photos of the band members. Story continues on page 209

Story continued from page 144 **Capitol loves the scratches. They use them on everything—bin cards, store banners, tour posters, pins, Website, ads, and the CD's shrink-wrapping—everything but the CD liner itself, arguably the most important component of the design job. Once the shrink-wrapping is removed, the CD takes on a completely different look. It is graced—or disgraced, depending on how you look at it—by a somewhat sophomoric painting of vines by the band's front man, Craig Nicholls.**

No one likes the painting—no one but Craig. The designers and the people at Capitol do everything they can to prevent it from appearing anywhere but in Craig's parents' hallway. Three of Capitol's top executives come to karlssonwilker's office to try to prevent the inevitable. Jan covers the office alone, as Hjalti is away in Iceland. The executives arrive on time, then spend the next two hours busying themselves on their phones and text messengers until Craig and his manager show up. Jan shows everyone several schemes for how the CD could look without Craig's painting, and the painter throws a fit. This is not particularly unusual—music executives are practiced in managing such outbursts. But they do not know how to manage this one. It is more than just a tantrum—Craig seems on the point of a breakdown. And with both an MTV interview and a live concert coming up later in the day, they decide to back off. The painting will print.

The executives leave, but Craig stays. He likes it at karlssonwilker. In fact, *he thinks Jan is cool. How exciting it is to have your own office and to work on design all day. He sits next to Jan at his computer that afternoon and half of the next day, making suggestions for the CD design and reveling in all the fun. Jan does not mind the company. He finds Craig charming, for all his quirkiness. Craig is a bit on the edge, and this makes things interesting. At one point, Ella has to walk him across the street to McDonald's because he is too scared by the view outside the office window to make the trip himself. He asks if the four dollars in his pocket is enough to buy a donut downstairs. When he wants to phone a friend, Jan has to dial the number for him. When all these trials are over, they have a design. The CD liner is filled with solid blocks of color taken from the painting, both referencing the erratic artwork and quieting it down a bit. The credit in the liner notes reads, "Designed in one day by Craig Nicholls and Jan Wilker at karlssonwilker inc., NYC."*

Highly Evolved is released in July 2002. Soon the Vines appear on the MTV Music Awards and on an MTV concert from the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. In September, they are on the cover of *Rolling Stone*, and in December, on the cover of *The Face*. The more exposure they get, the better for karlssonwilker. For the first time in a long time, Hjalti and Jan feel that their office is safe.

Design Pimpin'. Bigtime.

The phones are ringing off the hooks at karlssonwilker. It would be such a nice story that, after all Hjalti and Jan's hard work, the Vines bring them their big break, and Coke and Pepsi are now phoning them at all hours. But unfortunately, these are all unwanted calls, the calls of toner salesmen, fire-extinguisher inspectors, and Republican party recruiters. Hjalti and Jan refer these calls to their

THE VINES

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